

Ref m2

312

[Village of Ulad 'Abd el-Mumin]

Caravan

[278] soon died. Someone had poisoned him, not out of malice but as part
 813 of a scientific experiment—to test a new batch of poison before using
 it on the intended human victim. This feeling for science is strong
 among the Riffians. Once in a local feud a warrior shot a hydro-
 cephalic opponent, not because he was a dangerous foe but in order
 to see what was inside his head. At great risk of life the warrior
 crawled over an exposed bank to retrieve the body. With his kinsmen
 he carried it to the mosque, where the schoolmaster trephined the
 grotesque skull. Draining out some of the liquid, he tasted it with
 his finger. "It is a little salty," he said. Then they all went back to
 their fighting.

133 The village where this took place was hardly a village at all, since it
 361 consisted of only thirteen houses in 1926. These were scattered along
 621 both sides of the small but tumultuous mountain stream called the
 Water of Iherrushen, just above where it joined a larger river, the
 Bayu, which flowed swiftly out of a perpendicular-walled canyon. As
 one sees this country from above, the flattest ground is near the
 crest of the divide; consequently the villages are more frequent here
 than where it is steeper lower down. The upstream people also get
 the first use of the water, vital for irrigation.

346 If we look closely we will see that one of the houses is a mosque.

• 368 It has no minaret, but a white flag flying from the roof peak pro-
 173 claims its holy purpose, which the whitewash on the porch and
 621 around the outer rims of the windows confirms. Legend has it that
 the ancestor of the inhabitants of this village, one 'Abd el-Mumin
 (in Arabic al-Mu'min, from whom they and the village derive their
 name, Ulad 'Abd el-Mumin) walked up the waters of the Iherrushen
 one afternoon just as the sun was setting over the divide to the west,
 his wife and his cow and his dog wading with him. Silhouetted
 against the sunlight he saw this mosque, newly built and empty, its
 door open, standing before him. Faced with this miracle he scuffed
 off the grass sandals with which he had been protecting his feet from
 the sharp stones, and entered the holy place to pray. He and his sons
 hewed and walled terraces along the valley, felled some trees and
 planted others, and all lived peacefully until the valley was full and
 men fell to quarreling over fruit trees, women, and water.

621 The twelve houses which we saw held ten men with their thirteen
 595 wives, nineteen sons, and fifteen daughters. That three men had two
 wives at once is no wonder, since six out of nine of their fathers